Breaking the silence

2 Samuel 13:1-22

13 Some time passed. David's son Absalom had a beautiful sister whose name was Tamar; and David's son Amnon fell in love with her. 2 Amnon was so tormented that he made himself ill because of his sister Tamar, for she was a virgin and it seemed impossible to Amnon to do anything to her. 3 But Amnon had a friend whose name was Jonadab, the son of David's brother Shimeah; and Jonadab was a very crafty man. 4 He said to him, "O son of the king, why are you so haggard morning after morning? Will you not tell me?" Amnon said to him, "I love Tamar, my brother Absalom's sister." 5 Jonadab said to him, "Lie down on your bed, and pretend to be ill; and when your father comes to see you, say to him, 'Let my sister Tamar come and give me something to eat, and prepare the food in my sight, so that I may see it and eat it from her hand.'" 6 So Amnon lay down, and pretended to be ill; and when the king came to see him, Amnon said to the king, "Please let my sister Tamar come and make a couple of cakes in my sight, so that I may eat from her hand."

7 Then David sent home to Tamar, saying, "Go to your brother Amnon's house, and prepare food for him." 8 So Tamar went to her brother Amnon's house, where he was lying down. She took dough, kneaded it, made cakes in his sight, and baked the cakes. 9 Then she took the pan and set them out before him, but he refused to eat. Amnon said, "Send out everyone from me." So, everyone went out from him. 10 Then Amnon said to Tamar, "Bring the food into the chamber, so that I may eat from your hand." So, Tamar took the cakes she had made, and brought them into the chamber to Amnon her brother. 11 But when she brought them near him to eat, he took hold of her, and said to her, "Come, lie with me, my sister." 12 She answered him, "No, my brother, do not force me; for such a thing is not done in Israel; do not do anything so vile! 13 As for me, where could I carry my shame? And as for you, you would be as one of the scoundrels in Israel. Now therefore, I beg you, speak to the king; for he will not withhold me from you." 14 But he would not listen to her; and being stronger than she, he forced her and lay with her.

15 Then Amnon was seized with a very great loathing for her; indeed, his loathing was even greater than the lust he had felt for her. Amnon said to her, "Get out!" 16 But she said to him, "No, my brother; for this wrong in sending me away is greater than the other that you did to me." But he would not listen to her. 17 He called the young man who served him and said, "Put

this woman out of my presence, and bolt the door after her." 18 Now she was wearing a long robe with sleeves; for this is how the virgin daughters of the king were clothed in earlier times. So his servant put her out, and bolted the door after her. 19 But Tamar put ashes on her head and tore the long robe that she was wearing; she put her hand on her head, and went away, crying aloud as she went.

20 Her brother Absalom said to her, "Has Amnon your brother been with you? Be quiet for now, my sister; he is your brother; do not take this to heart." So, Tamar remained, a desolate woman, in her brother Absalom's house. 21 When King David heard of all these things, he became very angry, but he would not punish his son Amnon, because he loved him, for he was his firstborn. 22 But Absalom spoke to Amnon neither good nor bad; for Absalom hated Amnon, because he had raped his sister Tamar.

Absalom and Tamar were children of David and Maacah, daughter of Talmai, king of Geshur. Amnon, was David's first born who was the child of Ahinoam. Amnon had a polluted love for his half-sister that was actually fueled by lust. It was unlawful for Amnon to do anything to his sister and to even marry her because of the law of Moses. Amnon had plotted with his cousin Jonadab to lure his sister into to his room by pretending to be ill. Amnon's deceit was not only to Tamar but to his entire family. Amnon was able to look from his bedroom into the courtyard where Tamar was cooking for him. Tamar was a woman in a society where she had to do what she was told in regard to men in authority over her. No one would've suspected any ill intentions from Amnon when he insisted that Tamar come to his room. Tamar says to Amnon, "13 What about me? Where could I get rid of my disgrace? And what about you? You would be like one of the wicked fools in Israel. Please speak to the king; he will not keep me from being married to you." 14 But he refused to listen to her, and since he was stronger than she, he raped her.

The Center for Bioethics & Human Dignity defines human dignity as, "the recognition that human beings possess a special value intrinsic to their humanity and as such are worthy of respect simply because they are human beings." Like Tamar, women are still treated as objects, devalued, silenced, and abused. The voices of rape victims then and now are still being silenced. Tamar's story is like many others we hear through their cries. Many men in authority over women weaponize their position and stature thus resulting in unhealthy relationships or thoughts towards another person.

"No, my brother, do not force me; for such a thing is not done in Israel; do not do anything so vile! 13 As for me, where could I carry my shame? And as for you, you would be as one of the scoundrels in Israel. Now therefore, I beg you, speak to the king; for he will not withhold me from you." David, the father and the king, didn't weep for his daughter who had been violated but he wept for his son. David didn't punish Amnon for his actions because he was privileged and in line to be the next King. We have to lament and mourn with our victims even when they are silent. We reinforce shame by not allowing their voices to be heard. In Romans 12:15, God calls us to rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. It is our duty to help those who have been hurt to be free from shame and guilt.

As we look at verse 14, “But he would not listen to her; and being stronger than she, he forced her and lay with her,” we learn that some translations define “he forced her” not only as physical pain but also that Amnon humiliated Tamar with the act of rape and incest.

Amnon had not only stripped Tamar of her dignity but of her life and future. In the ancient Middle East, a woman who lost her virginity outside of marriage also lost her chance at a good life and her prospect of marriage.

Many victims of rape feel as though they don’t have anything to live for. They feel no hope for their future. We must lament passionately and express our feelings of grief and pain on behalf of those who have been hurt. As we lament and stand with those who have been hurt by gender-based violence, studying the biblical stories of victims of gender-based violence will show us how God wants us to respond.

Reflection

What surprises you about this story?

How can we serve those who are marginalized through acts of gender-based violence?

How do our own beliefs address the problem of sexual violence against women?

Prayer:

God, you have called us to weep with those who mourn. Today we take a moment to pause, reflect, pray, and advocate for the end of gender-based violence.

Additional resources from World Council of Churches

Peace without Violence against Women: The Rape of Tamar:
https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/File/BiblicalJourneyforJustice_Chapter4.pdf